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WE MUST KNOW THE WRITINGS OF REVOLUTIONARY LEADERS

By Wang Hsin-pang

- COMMUNIST CHINA -

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- WE MUST KNOW THE WRITINGS OF REVOLUTIONARY LEADERS

- COMMUNIST CHINA -

[The following is a translation of an article written by Wang Hsin-pang in Kwang-ming Jih-pao, Peiping, 1 September 1960, page 5]

After reading Comrade Chu P'ei-ming's article entitled "T'ien Chao T'ien Mou Chih Yo" (Agrarian Reform of T'ai P'ing Revolution) Was not Reactionary under the Historical Conditions of Its Time" which appeared in the "Historical Study" section of Kwang-ming Jih-pao, 5 March 1960, I feel there are several points which merit further analysis. I would like to present my personal views for discussion with Comrade Chu P'ei-ming (hereafter referred to as Comrade Chu) and also invite the criticisms of our fellow comrades.

First of all, I feel that Comrade Chu has not studied the classic writings of our revolutionary leaders earnestly. Although he agreed that "Agrarian Reform of T'ai P'ing Revolution" had possessed its backward fancy, but he concluded that "it was not reactionary under the historical conditions of its time." To support his contention,

Comrade Chu endeavored to establish his argument on the theories of classic writers and suggested "an examination of these classic writers' evaluation of the peasant Utopia." He quoted Lenin's criticism of "peasant land Utopia" in the latter's article "The Fifth Congress of Soviet Social Democratic Labor Party":

"Let us analyze the meaning of peasant land Utopia in the light of our present revolution. What is the peasants' principal Utopia? No doubt, it is the idea of equal division of land. They believe that by eliminating private ownership of land and enforcing equal division of land (or land utilization), they can eliminate the source of poverty, unemployment and exploitation."

"Undoubtedly, from the standpoint of socialism, this is Utopia but it is the Utopia of the petty-bourgeoisie. From the standpoint of socialism, this is reactionary prejudice because the socialistic ideal of the proletariats is not the equality of small property owners but the state-ownership of mass production. Please do not forget that we are not trying to evaluate the meaning of the peasants' ideal in midst of socialistic movement, but the meaning of the peasants' ideal amidst the present democratic revolution of the bourgeoisie. In the present revolution, all land is seized from the landlords and allocated or equally distributed among the peasants. Could this be Utopia? Is it reactionary? No! Not only it is not reactionary; on the contrary, it represents the most thorough and determined fulfillment of our

desire to abolish the entire old system and the remnants of serfdom. If 'equality' could be maintained under the conditions of commercial production or 'equality' could be considered as the beginning of semi-socialism, such idea may be termed as Utopian. But the peasants' desire is to seize the land from the landlords and distribute it equally among them. This is not Utopia, but revolution in the strictest and most scientific sense of the word. Seizure of land and equal distribution of land ownership will provide the foundation for the swiftest, freest and the most widespread development of capitalism." (underscored by Comrade Chu)

In his article, Comrade Chu suggested that "criticism of peasant Utopia must be hinged upon the difference in time, place and other conditions," but he forgot to study under what conditions did Lenin discuss peasant Utopia and what was Lenin's overall view of peasant Utopia. Instead, he quoted out of context only those passages which appeared to lend support to his own argument and he went on to explain in his notes: Lenin advanced similar views in his writings such as "Social Democratic Party's Principles of Land Reform during the First Soviet Revolution, 1905-1907," "Two Kinds of Utopia," "In Memory of Kal(transliteration) Village," "Marx Discussing the American 'Equal Distribution of Land' Movement."

Under what conditions did Lenin bring up this problem for dialectic discussion? Let us examine what Lenin said in his

"The Fifth Congress of Russian Social Democratic Labor Party":

"What did Menshevik of the Peasant Democratic faction say? He resolved to discuss simultaneously the bourgeoisie's 'realism' with the peasants' 'land Utopia' and considered them as the same or at least similar in nature for comparison. Menshevik declared that it was necessary to struggle against the bourgeoisie's opportunism; similarly it was also necessary to struggle against the peasants' utopianism and the petty-bourgeoisie's revolutionism. This is a typical viewpoint of Menshevism. We need to discuss such a view because it is basically erroneous. Based upon such a viewpoint, the practical policy will inevitably yield a series of incorrect conclusions. Superficially it appears to be a criticism of the peasants' Utopia, but in fact, it demonstrates a lack of understanding of the responsibility of the proletariat to motivate the peasants to secure complete victory in the democratic revolution." ("Complete Works of Lenin", volume 12, page 450)

Aiming directly at Menshevik's erroneous viewpoint, Lenin proceeded to clarify the revolutionary function of peasants' land Utopia during the stage of democratic revolution of the Russian bourgeoisie. Lenin's view was quoted by Comrade Chu, but in doing so, he must not overlook the preceding passage. To further elucidate this matter, let us examine again what Lenin stated in his "Social Democratic Party's Principles of Land Reform during the First Soviet Revolution":

"The doctrines of Menshevism reflected more or less correctly the peasants' outlook toward the struggle for seizure of land. What is the meaning of this doctrine? The essence of Menshevist doctrine comprised two principles, namely 'work' and 'equality'. The 'bourgeois' character of these two principles are quite evident and have often been exposed in the Marxists' writings without the need for further reiteration. However, we must point out here that, in the past, the members of Russian Social Democratic Party did not accord them the evaluation they deserved. These principles, through their rather obscure form, reflect correctly certain realistic and progressive phenomenon, which is the life-and-death struggle against large landlords and serfdom."

"Certain errors of the Marxists are found in their criticism of these Mensheviks' principles because they have overlooked the historically realistic and rational contents of these principles during their anti-serfdom struggle. They criticized, quite correctly, the principles of 'work' and 'equality' as being a part of the backward and reactionary petty-bourgeois socialism, but they forgot that these principles also reflected the progressive and revolutionary democratism of the petty-bourgeoisie. They forgot that these very principles had been the banner of struggle against serfdom and Czarist Russia." ("Complete Works of Lenin", volume 13, page 216-217)

The issue is quite clear: Lenin directed his criticism against

the outrageous and harmful views of those Mensheviks who chose to overthrow simultaneously the peasants' "Land Utopia" and the bourgeois "realism". He argued against certain members of Social Democratic Party and certain Marxists who "overlooked" or "forgot" to give these principles their deserved evaluation. He used this argument to amplify the revolutionary function of the peasants' "Land Utopia" during the stage of bourgeois democratic revolution. To emphasize the issue, Lenin necessarily devoted considerable space in his foregoing writings to prove dialectically what the others had overlooked, but dismissed summarily the backward and reactionary nature of petty-bourgeois socialism which had been thoroughly exposed and earnestly criticized. This is entirely correct and quite understandable. I am of the opinion that it is essential to understand the issue clearly because, only through correct understanding of the issue, can we grasp the spiritual essence of the foregoing writings and avoid biased interpretation of the classic writings of our revolutionary leaders.

In quoting Lenin's criticism of the errors of certain Marxists, we have in fact revealed Lenin's complete views toward the peasants' Land Utopia, i.e. during the stage of bourgeois democratic revolution, we must criticize the peasants' land Utopia as being a part of the backward and reactionary petty-bourgeois socialism, but at the same time, we must not forget that these principles reflected the progressiv

and revolutionary petty-bourgeois democracy. We must not forget that these principles were the banner of the determined struggle against the feudalistic land ownership. To accept one phase but absolutely attack the other phase is not the concept of Marxism-Leninism. Of course, the dual nature inherent in the peasants' land Utopia did not remain constant at all times. At the time of bourgeois democratic revolution, its revolutionary and progressive nature was essential, but that did not imply it was devoid of its backward and reactionary characteristics. Only when the stage of socialistic revolution was reached, its backward and reactionary nature was completely exposed to emerge as the dominant phase of the issue.

Through careful study instead of conjecture, we will discover what Lenin actually meant in his writings as quoted by Comrade Chu was not the same as Comrade Chu's interpretation. We need only to examine how Lenin, in his "Marx Discussing the American 'Equal Distribution of Land' Movement", explained "Marx's dialectic and revolutionary criticism" to ascertain that Lenin's views toward the peasants' land Utopia were the same as those expressed in the afore-mentioned two articles. Lenin agreed completely with Marx's attitude toward the American "Equal Distribution of Land Movement", i.e. on the one hand, relentlessly attacking and mercilessly ridiculing the outrageous superficiality of the movement; on the other hand, he did not completely negate everything but instead employed the

cold logic of materialism to strip the exterior of its vulgar philosophy and exposed its healthy inner core.

Why did the peasants' land Utopia embody a "dual" nature during the stage of bourgeois democratic revolution? On the basis of his astute analysis of the peasant class, Lenin pointed out the correct answer. He stated:

"The Workers' faction (including the Social Revolutionary Party members) obviously oscillated between the liberal faction and the proletariat class. We single out this point, and should do so because such instability is not an accidental phenomenon. It necessarily originates from the economic position of the small producers. On the one hand, the small producer, oppressed and exploited, instinctively rebels against this condition, seeks democracy and realizes his dream to eliminate exploitation. On the other hand, he is a small land owner -- a peasant with the instinct of land owner (if not a land owner today, he will be a land owner tomorrow). The land owner's instinct for private ownership urges him to desert the proletariat class, stirs the peasant with hope and thirst for the day of emancipation, when he himself will be a bourgeois, hanging on tenaciously to his small piece of land, hanging on to his own pile of refuse (as Marx vehemently said so), making his stand against the entire society." ("Complete Works of Lenin", volume 12, page 452-453)

Similar statements may be found in "In Memory of Kal Village"

and "Two Kinds of Utopia". In "In Memory of Kal Village", Lenin stated: "Revolutionary peasants ("Worker-Peasant Alliance"), at the time, sought with every means to destroy the landlords' system of land ownership until the abolition of 'private land ownership'. They struggled as landowners and small entrepreneurs." ("Selected Works of Lenin", volume 1, page 768)

In his foregoing writings, Lenin pinpointed his criticism against those who "negated" everything indiscriminately committing the error of not discerning the revolutionary nature of the peasants' land Utopia during the stage of bourgeois democratic revolution, but his criticism was equally enlightening for those who affirmed everything not realizing that, at the same time, the inherent backward and reactionary nature of the peasants' land Utopia. His criticism of the peasants' land Utopia, in fact, concerned the attitude of the proletariats toward the peasants' movement and also the strategy of the proletariats during the stage of democratic revolution. In essence, it was the problem of the proletariats' concern over the authority of revolutionary leadership during the stage of democratic revolution. On the basis of his analysis of the "dual" nature of the peasants' land Utopia, he astutely pointed out the attitude of the proletariats toward the peasants' movement during the stage of democratic revolution: "The proletariats should actively assist the peasants' uprising until all land is confiscated -- but definitely

not until the formation of all the empty plans of the petty-bourgeoisie. When the peasants' movement is a revolutionary democratic movement, we support the peasants' movement. We are preparing (now and at once) that, once it becomes a reactionary and anti-proletariat movement, we shall struggle against it. The whole substance of Marxism culminates in the proposal of this dual responsibility. Only those who fail to understand Marxism would simplify this dual responsibility and reduce it to the level of a single and one-dimensional responsibility." ("Selected Works of Lenin", volume 1, page 687) Any partial view of the peasants' land Utopia will only tend to oversimplify this dual responsibility and reduce it to its single aspect. Those who do not recognize the revolutionary nature of the peasants' land Utopia during the stage of democratic revolution and insist upon lumping it with the bourgeois realism as the object of their struggle, will not be willing to lead the peasants' movement. Conversely, those who recognize only the revolutionary nature of the peasants' land Utopia during the stage of democratic revolution but overlook its reactionary nature, will assume that the peasants' movement can succeed without the leadership of the proletarians and thus concede the leadership to the bourgeoisie. In substance, this is to view the problem of the peasants from the standpoint of the bourgeoisie and not from the standpoint of the proletarians.

In summarizing the foregoing, we can see that Comrade Chu

presented only isolated and partial interpretation of his quotations from Lenin's writings and used this partial interpretation as a basis for his evaluation of "Agrarian Reform of T'ai P'ing Revolution".

There is no doubt that his argument can not stand up under the circumstance.

In the "Agrarian Reform of T'ai P'ing Revolution", the principle of equal division of land was the nucleus of the entire program. It fully expressed the thorough and determined character of the struggle against feudalism, and at the time it played a vital part in mobilizing and inciting the revolutionary war. Under the prevailing historical conditions, its revolutionary and progressive character was essential. But, on the other hand, this principle further proposed demands exceeding its historical mission, i.e. it went beyond its mission to abolish feudalism and demanded the abolition of all forms of private ownership -- a demand directly opposing the trend of social development. In doing so, it served to consolidate the disintegrating petty-peasant economy which was the ultimate objective of the revolution. Thus, the "Agrarian Reform of T'ai P'ing Revolution" revealed its visionary and backward nature, which was endorsed by Comrade Chu. Perhaps, it is necessary to examine the editorial "On the Occasion of the Centennial Anniversary of T'ai P'ing Revolution" which appeared in Jen-Min Jih-pao, 11 January 1951. The editorial stated:

"The land reform program of T'ai P'ing Revolution ("Agrarian Reform of T'ai P'ing Revolution") on the one hand expressed the

revolutionary demand for land of the oppressed peasant masses under the feudalistic system; on the other hand, the leaders of T'ai P'ing Revolution were only able to see through the narrow vision of the peasant class a pattern for equality. According to this pattern, every peasant family would have the equal possession of a fixed quantity of land and property enabling them to maintain subsistence. It was impossible to realize such a pattern because it did not stand for the progressive development of the productive forces of the society, but instead it kept the productive forces in a stagnant condition on the level of disintegrated petty-peasant economy. Therefore, this type of visionary agrarian socialistic idea is reactionary in substance." (underscored by the writer quoting this passage)

After quoting the famous statement by Engels in his analysis of Utopian socialism -- "That which is considered incorrect from the standpoint of economic theory may be quite correct in the light of world history" -- Comrade Chu believed that we must differentiate precisely the economic theoretical mistakes of "Agrarian Reform of T'ai P'ing Revolution" from the issue whether or not it was reactionary in real struggle. His belief was all right in principle, but the key point is that in order to separate the two aspects precisely, one must first admit their existence. A careful analysis of Comrade Chu's opinions would reveal that he actually believed in

evaluating whether or not "Agrarian Reform of T'ai P'ing Revolution" was reactionary under the historical conditions of the time by employing the criterion whether or not the "Agrarian Reform of T'ai P'ing Revolution" was reactionary in real struggle, but he avoided the analysis of those class peculiarities and characteristics arising from the economic theoretical mistakes of the "Agrarian Reform of T'ai P'ing Revolution".

We believe the "Agrarian Reform of T'ai P'ing Revolution" possessed backward and visionary characteristics and could not be materialized. Or, during its first application, it would be compelled by circumstances to undergo drastic revision and "retreat into the limited area permitted by the prevailing conditions of the time." ("Complete Works of Marx and Engels", volume 7, page 405) The impossibility of realizing such a program or the necessity of subjecting it to drastic revision completely proved that the visionary nature of "Agrarian Reform of T'ai P'ing Revolution" was contradictory to the then-prevailing historical conditions, and therefore, it was "reactionary".

But Comrade Chu did not study the issue from this angle but instead he maintained "since 'Agrarian Reform of T'ai P'ing Revolution' possessed certain visionary characteristics, it could not be materialized. Therefore, it would be meaningless for us to conclude that application of such a program would be detrimental to the

society's productive capacity. In fact, the heroes of T'ai P'ing Revolution did not implement compulsory enforcement of this visionary principle. At the same time, we can not find any evidence that this principle hindered the development of capitalism. Material proof has demonstrated that although the country was rife with internal strifes and wars, the productive capacity, instead of withering, continued to develop. Therefore, it is evident that in evaluating 'Agrarian Reform of T'ai P'ing Revolution' we must begin with reality."

Such statements are confusing as well as puzzling. Why should we consider "Agrarian Reform of T'ai P'ing Revolution" as "meaningless" simply because it was visionary, impractical and therefore detrimental to the productive forces in the society? If "the heroes of T'ai P'ing Revolution did not implement compulsory enforcement of this visionary principle," could we employ "Material proof has demonstrated...." and etc. to prove such as the result of implementing "Agrarian Reform of T'ai P'ing Revolution"?

We must search for the reason why this program could not be implemented? Why the heroes of T'ai P'ing Revolution did not apply compulsory adoption of this visionary principle? On this point, Comrade Chu only admitted that it was visionary, but he did not go one step further to seek out the substance of its visionary nature. The visionary nature of "Agrarian Reform of T'ai P'ing Revolution", in substance,

was the very idea of absolute equality as originated from the characteristics of the peasant class' small productive economy. Such idea is not only impossible to materialize in the age of socialism, but it is also impossible to materialize under capitalistic system. It is contrary not only to the doctrine of state ownership of all means of production under socialism but is also contrary to the private ownership of all means of production in the capitalistic society. Although the leaders of T'ai P'ing Revolution were revolutionary heroes, not even they could overcome the deep-seated concept of private ownership and implement "compulsory enforcement" of such a visionary principle. It is indeed meaningless not to understand the substance of the visionary characteristics and merely label the principle as visionary.

At the conclusion of Comrade Chu' article, he stated: "Although the 'Agrarian Reform of T'ai P'ing Revolution' was not realized, T'ai P'ing Revolution did apply 'allocation of land according to actual cultivation', a program of 'each peasant cultivating his rented farm for his own consumption.' Under the prevailing conditions of the time, this was a practicable policy to protect the peasants' rights and overthrow the landlord class, which proved that 'Agrarian Reform of T'ai P'ing Revolution' had performed an outstanding revolutionary function in application and did not hinder the development of productive capacity."

For the moment, let us not bother with the interpretation of "allocation of land according to actual cultivation" and "each peasant cultivating his rented farm for his own consumption," or whether or not it was a precisely meaningful policy. Comrade Chu has already stated that these principles were applied at the time when "Agrarian Reform of T'ai P'ing Revolution" could not be implemented to "safeguard the peasants' rights and overthrow the landlord class." Then we must ask: Can we lump the aforesaid principles with the "Agrarian Reform of T'ai P'ing Revolution" and use the actual application of the former to prove the latter's alleged revolutionary function in real struggle? Obviously, we can not draw such an analogy. However, we may be able to agree if Comrade Chu had interpreted that the entire concept of "Agrarian Reform of T'ai P'ing Revolution" could not be materialized under the conditions of the time, but T'ai P'ing Revolution, in actual circumstances, did accomplish certain land policies to safeguard the peasants' rights, overthrow the landlord class and facilitate the development of productive capacity of the society, which was in keeping with the anti-feudalistic revolutionary spirit of the "Agrarian Reform of T'ai P'ing Revolution"

Finally, I would like to point out emphatically that I undertake this discussion with Comrade Chu P'ai-ming concerning whether or not the "Agrarian Reform of T'ai P'ing Revolution" was reactionary with full realization that under the historical conditions of the time, it

possessed certain revolutionary and progressive qualities, which were vital. Are we demanding too much from or being unfair to the heroes of T'ai P'ing Revolution in recognizing certain revolutionary and progressive qualities of the "Agrarian Reform of T'ai P'ing Revolution", but at the same time, labelling it as reactionary? (as cautiously pointed out by Comrade Chu)

Of course, it would appear unreasonable or unfair if we have reproached the heroes of T'ai P'ing Revolution for failure to free themselves from the restrictions of the historical conditions of the time, or for committing certain errors; or if we have demanded that they should have formulated a scientific revolutionary doctrine and etc. But it is neither unfair nor unreasonable to point out correctly the mistakes of the heroes of T'ai P'ing Revolution as well as the nature and cause of their mistakes. On the contrary, this is the duty of all workers in the field of historical science.